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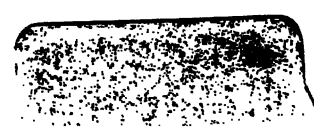

THE MEMORY OF THE JUST.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN

FIRST CHURCH ON THE SUNDAY AFTER

THE DEATH OF

JOSEPH P. BRADLEE,

25 FEBRUARY, 1838.

BY N. L. FROTHINGHAM,

MINISTER OF THE CHURCH.

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SERMON.

PROVERBS x. 7.

The memory of the just is blessed.

Our names live after us. We shall soon be only names and memories. There will be nothing else left of us in the places where we are most familiarly known. But these will remain a little while, or a great while,—more or less deep, more or less dear,—a satisfaction or a sorrow, a pride or a reproach, among those we leave behind. We shall not be altogether forgotten,—not even those of us, of whom the great world knows the least. There will be fragrance or an offence from our dust. Men will speak of us, when we lie insensible to censure or praise. Their hearts will bring

to our graves and images their complaint or their benediction. Who but must wish, that for himself it might be the last of these? We look upon our names as parts of us. We guard them while we live, and we look forward to what they will be when we can guard them no longer. We would have them last, at least for a short generation, and shine while they last. We would attach to them some measures of love and honour. We would keep them as free from every deserved crimination, as if we were to be here to bear its rebuke. Nay, more. For death is a solemn seal, and there is something unusually affecting in the appeal that we silently address to days and judgments to come. They who make the least account of posthumous fame would be pained to think that they should be remembered unkindly, or not remembered at all. And they, who have most distinguished themselves by a noble defiance of opinion, have been sustained by the hope that opinion would at some time do them justice.

There is nothing in this at variance with those precepts of the gospel, which enjoin upon us to give less attention to our repute than to our deeds, and less to our deeds than to the dispositions and principles from which they flow. We are not departing from the spirit of that true law, which

would have us make the outside sightly by preserving the inside uncorrupt. For we are not speaking of any pretenders to uprightness, but of "the just;"—the just, contemplating their conduct with all its motives, walking in the light of a clear conscience and the strength of a solid character, and thus seeking to live in the respect of those they act with, and in the affections of those from whom they must part;—to live, after their life is spent, in the example that needs no retouching to keep it fresh, and in the services that they shall put their hand to no more. We know that nothing should be done through vain-glory. We know that it is a base thing to labour and contrive for appearances only. But there is an honest pride which the most unpretending may cherish, and there is a generous ambition which no proper construction of Christian humility, and disinterestedness, and self-denying reserves, forbids or discountenances. It is the pride of an unassailable fidelity endeavouring to do its best. It is the ambition to be appreciated in our feelings and purposes; to be attended by kind regards on the way we are going; and to leave the gratitude of those to whom we seemed deserving, and the regrets of those to whom we were dear, to stand in our place when we shall have departed.

"A good name," says the book of Proverbs in another place, "is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold." And indeed, if it be a weakness to covet such a treasure, it is a weakness, of which only the best minds are capable, and of which a saint need not be ashamed. It is elevated far above the aims of any ordinary selfishness. Selfishness it in no sense is; for it looks for the regard of others, and it means the service of others. It craves no sordid delights. It consents to none of the grosser remunerations. It is content to dwell in that shadowy region of loving remembrances and unheard commendations, where the senses take no part in the enjoyment, and mere wealth can buy no inheritance.

"A good name," we read in another part of the scriptures, "is better than precious balsams." They poured such upon guests as they sat crowned at the feast, and they poured such upon the dead as they lay ready for their burial. But what is the utmost joy of a transient festival to that of a well-earned repute? And how vain is all that can be done for the inanimate form of man, compared with the embalming of what he was and what he wrought, in the beating hearts of his brethren!

"The memory of the just," says the text, speaking in the same spirit but with a further meaning, "is blessed." It speaks in the same spirit, for what is the "memory" which it praises but a prolonged reputation? But it speaks with a further meaning, because it leaves every consideration of present favour, and looks forward to what shall survive us. "Memory" implies something past and gone. It is an inscription upon a monument. The dead are underneath. There is something sacred about this. It wears an unchangeable face. It cannot be sought from any interested motive, and cannot be granted unless from a cordial sensibility. Many a man is extolled from adulation or the hope of reward, while he sits in place, or may hold others in expectancy. Many a one covets to be extolled, in order that he may so sit and be enabled, that he may be looked upon and applauded, that he may improve his condition, or at least gratify his pride. But they pass away, both one and the other, and their commendation passes with them. Oblivion, or something worse, creeps over their names. Their seeming shall never take the stamp of reality. Time will not sanction a falsehood. The selfish tribute and the selfish ambition perish together. But the true soul hands over its worth to the new generations. Men are most sensible of its value, when only its remem-

brance is left among them. They count its services after they are done. They set up its example, like a permanent statue, when the form that it once walked in has gone back to the earth. They look upon what it accomplished, and ask, who will do the same for us now? They record the manifestations of itself that it made, heightening them perhaps by their private attachment and sorrow, and it seems lovelier in idea than when it was moving before their eyes. They contrast it with what they observe of meaner spirits, and with what strikes them now more than ever,—the surrounding falseness and self-seeking of the world. Thus, while it is "received up" into that other sphere, which the Divine Providence has prepared for it, and the divine word assured to it, it bequeaths to this a testimony that will not easily be effaced, and a still living influence.

"The memory of the just is blessed." For them is that distinction reserved, to them confined. More imposing qualities cannot attain to that, whatever else they may win. Learning may heap up the fruits of its researches, and heroism the trophies of its conquests, for coming times. The inventors of useful arts will write their applause on what they have invented, and, be their characters what they will, that writing will stand.

Genius will levy its admiration upon the world and its ages. Science will make the forces of nature and the stars of the sky tell of it, as they work and flame, "the same yesterday and to-day." Power, however used, will leave its print. Even the accidents of rank and outward condition will send along their claims at least, though they may be poor titles, to whatever fame they can secure. But a different deserving is here required. There is small need of conspicuous endowments or a leading good fortune. Knowledge is nothing, but as it has learned how to be faithful. Resources are nothing, but as they have employed themselves to do good. It is the spirit of love that must gain love. It is the disposition to bless, that must draw a blessing after it.

My hearers will perceive that they have been led to these reflections on account of the loss, which this church and this community have recently sustained by the death of a valued member. The thoughts appear to me such as are suggested naturally by the mention of him. The text applies to him with a remarkable significancy. I should be at a loss to find any other words in holy writ more suitable than they, with which to inscribe his tomb, or begin his eulogy. He was am-

bitious of a good name. He openly sought and honorably acquired it. He strove to make a place for himself, by deserving, in the regards and memories of men. "Whatsoever things were of good report," he thought of and practised; not through any method of calculation, not with any stooping of subserviency, not as a beggar or buyer of favorable opinions, but with a manly and free-spoken independence. He stood upon his character; and he established it as a substantial one, making it worth the prizing. I will speak of him; not so much for the sake of uttering his panegyric, which he needs not, and which your own minds have uttered already, as to hold up for imitation some of the parts that were most prominent in his upright life. I will speak of him,—and without restraint; for he was not insensible to an honest praise, nor averse from it, and he never had reason to be ashamed or afraid of any thing, that his enemy—if he had one—could truly tell.

There were some combinations in him, that to an attentive observer might appear remarkable. While he laboured for what was useful, and followed his pursuits, eager as the busiest, among the turmoil and dust of the world, he had an eye and a heart for all the forms of beauty. He sought for improvement in what embellishes society, as

well as in what makes it strong. And when one saw him turn from the homeliest materials of industry, to enjoy the embroidery of a leaf or the perfume of a flower, he could hardly help thinking that he saw there, emblematically portrayed, a description of his mind. Under his plain manners there lay refined and delicate feelings. In his roughest speech there was a friendly purpose. To the qualities of a bold and vigorous character he joined the tenderest sensibilities. Of an ardent and impetuous temperament, he was yet considerate of others and did well understand himself, not carried away by any ungenerous heats or undue elations.

But I must pass from this view of him, to present, in a word or two, some of the particular points that press most into notice.

And first stands out his integrity, his unswerving, uncompromising adherence to the right. To be merely scrupulously honest were somewhat, in these days, when the love of gain and the perplexities of the times have tempted so many consciences, and blighted so much peace. But with him the sense of justice was always a sentiment quick and watchful, incapable of a fault and impatient of a suspicion, resolving to persevere at

every hazard or sacrifice, and choosing any suffering rather than a dishonour.

By the side of this shining quality we must place his benevolence, wide and impartial as it was, warm and ready,—all but too ready. "To do good—hoping for nothing again," if it were not proposed as his rule, was at least adopted for his practice. His good-will was of no slumbering kind, folding its hands and doing nothing. It went about. It was full of activity. It was as generous of its efforts as it was of its means. It accomplished more by what it set in motion, than by what it gave. It excited others to emulation, or drew from them their reluctant aid, and so promoted in every way its charitable designs. It was patient also. It was not to be worn out by repeated demands. It was not to be mortified by repeated disappointments. It was not to be repelled even by unworthiness. It worked quietly where no one saw it. It worked obstinately when no one thanked him. He followed an impulse, that he would rather die than disobey. Many will look round in vain for their benefactor, and, while they "bless his memory," mourn that his kind face and open hand are reduced to that,

Nor was this disposition of his confined to every-day occurrences and private life. It took the form of public spirit. I am aware that, on this point, I am speaking to those who know more than I do. But he must be indeed a recluse, who has not heard something of his enterprize and perseverance, when works of general munificence were to be started into action, or were to be encouraged, and held on, and carried into effect, while they were languishing for want of help. Many of our institutions of philanthropy,—many of the ornaments of our city, which was one of his delights,—own their obligations to his friendly zeal. His name is not cast in the iron, or graven in the stone, of which they are composed,—nor did he wish it should be,—but it may be found among those of the liberal men, who did their best to fix them in their places.

He was a sincere and most open-hearted man. He had no disguises. He needed none. He despised them all. He would pass but for what he was. Whatever foible he might have been subject to,—whatever merit he might have possessed,—there it was,—and the world might look at it; and the world must have looked sharply to have detected there a meanness, or an hypocrisy, or the slightest habit of vice. His heart was

upon his lips; and, since its streams were abundant, the lips would partake of their flow. But truth and kindness and honour dwelt there. He would not say more than he thought, or other than he thought. He never claimed praise for more than he performed. He had a principled aversion to pretences and pretensions of every kind. He would do what he could, and let it go for what it was worth. If you liked it he was happy, and if you liked it not he was content. He was not a man to blush for having meant well,—and I have never known an instance in which he meant otherwise. You could make him your friend, and be sure that he would not keep back, through timidity or want of plain dealing, any thing that might be thought profitable to you. You could make him your friend, and be sure that he would never misuse your confidence.

And now there is one subject more, on which it specially becomes this place and this occasion to speak. Though there were nothing added, what has been said would yet be much. The character, that I have attempted in a few lines to trace, would show a nobleness and beauty, though we should contemplate it as disconnected from any religious motive or sentiment or hope; though we were left to suppose it might be only the natural

growth of a well-disposed mind, assisted by the mere general influence of a Christian community and a Christian education. But there is something to be added. We are not left, nor permitted, to separate the great element of religion from our estimation of the friend whom we lament. He made few professions; but his faith, though silent, was neither equivocal nor inoperative. We are not driven to infer this from the respect which he uniformly paid to the services of religion. Many observe its forms as reverently as he did, and remain untouched by its spirit. We need not call in, as to our aid, the interest which he felt to the last in this church of our Lord; within whose covenant he received for himself, when he first became the father of a family, the sign of Christian baptism, and to whose font he always brought his children, in solemn dedication of them to the Father of all souls. There is better testimony than such offerings as those. The course of a prosperous life, exempted remarkably from the most trying afflictions, gave little occasion for showing his religious trust otherwise than in the rectitude of his principles and the loving faithfulness of his deeds. Yet can you show me any better evidence, ye dogmatists and disputers and sectaries,—whom he never joined, and for whom he had even some distaste that he was at no pains

to conceal ? " Was not this to know me ? saith the Lord."

But when sickness came on, with no prospect of being well,—when his little strength was every day running down to less,—and the decree that he must depart was not to be mistaken,—then you might see the working of a power within him, that put the world calmly back and trusted in God. His thoughts were engaged in frequent devotion, detaching themselves silently from the things of time. He girt himself as for a serious but hopeful journey. With a collected spirit he left his closing counsels and benedictions. His last expressions were kind farewells to the near and to the most distant. And so he fell asleep. His end was peace. His " memory is blessed."

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